

How green is the RCP?

In 2024, the RCP endorsed a set of organisational sustainability commitments. Commentary takes a look at the progress made so far to embed sustainability into the RCP's activities.

In 2016, the RCP was a founding member of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change (UKHACC), an organisation that brings together the health community to campaign on climate change and sustainability. UKHACC has published 11 commitments – covering a range of areas including campaigning, educating and operational activities – to help member organisations mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The RCP signed up to these commitments in 2024 and has undertaken an audit to determine the progress that has been made against each category. In May 2025, we published our first report card, summarising the work that we have done so far – and setting out the future work that we need to do.

'We have been advocating for action on climate change for several years but our commitment extends beyond advocacy. We recognise that the climate crisis is the biggest threat to human health and we are dedicated to minimising the environmental impacts of our operations. That is why the RCP signed up to the UKHACC commitments – a set of guiding principles to help health organisations take steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change,' say RCP interim chief executives, Tom Baker and Catherine Powell.

Policy and campaigning work

Throughout recent years, the RCP has consistently declared that the climate emergency is a health emergency, as set out in our 2024 general election manifesto.

Campaigning for the government and NHS to mitigate the impact of climate change has been a priority for the RCP. This has involved being a founding member of UKHACC, co-hosting an event at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021, making healthcare sustainability and climate change a policy priority in 2023 and contributing to policy reports led by UKHACC. An advisory group on sustainability and climate was established in 2023 to steer this work, which is led by the RCP's special advisers on sustainability and climate change.

Encouraging our members to build their understanding of the links between health and climate change is a core aspect of the RCP's work in this space. In 2024, we published the Green physician toolkit – the first-of-its-

kind for the physician community – which suggested actions that physicians can take to practise greener medicine and adapt to climate change. UKHACC has even published this as a case study on its website. Podcasts and videos about the health impacts of climate change have been produced to leverage modern ways of communicating with physicians. Sustainability has also been a key feature of our conferences, with a net zero workshop taking place at Medicine 2025 to support our members to consider adopting sustainable healthcare in the workplace.

Our buildings and practices

As well as encouraging sustainable healthcare practices, the RCP has made significant strides in improving the environmental impact of our organisation.

In 2021, we ended all investments in fossil fuels – 2 years ahead of our initial deadline, and we signed the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty in 2022. Our new staff travel policy, implemented in 2025, discourages domestic air travel and asks claimants to consider the impact of travel on the planet.

RCP catering, provided by Company of Cooks, features a selection of plant-based options and we have been taking steps to improve our supply chains – prioritising local produce and working with companies like Waste Knot to help reduce food waste.

In both our London and Liverpool home, we have been reducing sources of plastic and other types of waste. In Liverpool, all food packaging is compostable – and in London, we have a compost area with five worm bins to process kitchen waste. The recycling rate in London has recently received a gold rating from the waste supplier; 0% of waste is sent to landfill, with an 8% recycling rate. With this we have saved over 30 tonnes of CO₂.

One of our highlights of 2024 was The Spine becoming WELL Certified™ at the Platinum level. The building was built with sustainability in mind and is the only venue in Liverpool to be awarded this certification.

Our next steps

The RCP at Regent's Park, London presents one of our main challenges. With recent upgrading and retrofitting – including making the building 99% LED compliant – the building now uses 100% renewable energy. As a Grade I listed site, built in the 1960s, it is not possible to achieve net zero in this building. Alignment with the RCP's sustainability goals is a key priority for future estates planning.

The Green physician toolkit will continue to be promoted to our members, and we will explore an update of this resource to ensure that its contents remain useful and relevant. There are plans to create more educational resources and embed sustainable healthcare into our current programmes, such as the Chief Registrar Programme. As a supporting partner of a newly established 5-year research hub that will help deliver a more sustainable NHS, we will continue to support its delivery.

The report card published in May 2025 was just our first; we will be publishing another later in 2025 and then provide an annual update from 2026 onwards. The RCP will continue to progress our work in this area, to make our organisation and healthcare delivery more sustainable.

Dr Bryony Alderman, the RCP sustainability fellow, stated:

‘Healthcare sustainability, and the complex interplay between climate change and health can feel like an overwhelming and insurmountable problem, so part of my role is to find ways to support physicians to build their knowledge and

feel empowered to make positive changes in clinical practice. The RCP has already published the excellent Green physician toolkit, but I have also been helping to deliver inspiring podcasts on topics such as sustainable quality improvement and sustainable diabetes care, and developing pre-made teaching materials to help spread the word!

Within the education directorate, we are working to embed teaching on healthcare sustainability within a range of new and updated workshops and courses, including the Chief Registrar Programme, as well as looking at how we can reduce the environmental impact of the courses we deliver.’

This feature was produced for the June 2025 edition of Commentary magazine and published on 18 June 2025. You can read a web-based version, which includes images.